

Should Obama run for president right now?

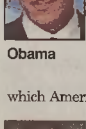
Out on the stump speaking in support of Democratic candidates around the country and pushing his newest book, "The Audacity of Hope," U.S. Sen. Barack Obama has fanned the flames of a potential run for Presidency in 2008.



RON
WALTERS

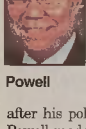
The airwaves have been rich with speculation now that he has altered his original position that he would serve out his six-year Senate term for the people of Illinois. Saying that he faced a different circumstance when he was first elected than under the current pressure, he boosted the speculation beginning last month as he headed up speakers at Tom Harkin's annual Steak Fry event in Iowa, many presidential hopes are made or dashed.

Obama fits the "fresh-face" yearning of many Democrats, especially when Mark Warner, former governor of Virginia, dropped out of contention from a list that looked like the recent past of the Democratic party: Hillary Clinton, John Edwards, John Kerry and Al Gore. The emergence of Obama added a new charismatic face to that picture, sparking evaluations of whether he could win.



Obama

This reminds me of the many question about the potential presidency of Colin Powell, when he was widely considered to be leading American public opinion in the early 1990s. Powell was also a fresh face, about which Americans knew little, especially his political positions. But they felt that he was vested in a political and cultural diversity that placed him in a different camp from that of Rev. Jesse Jackson or other civil rights leaders.



Powell

Americans yearn for an African American leader who will give them absolution from the narrative pain of slavery and, instead, take them beyond race into a world of inclusion and, as such, blur the remnants that slavery wrought in the present. Not long after his political definition began to sharpen and Colin Powell made known that he supported affirmative action and was not a believer in the reflexive use of military power to resolve international crises, his presidential star began to fade.

Currently, Democrats are looking for someone who could mend the hole in their moral armor, thinking that the 2004 election was won by the mobilization of voters of faith. Among those who have attempted to answer the critics that the Democratic Party does not know how to utilize the politics of morality, the senator's speeches have made this linkage more effectively than most. And his recent book contains an entire chapter that anchors and explains his unique religious journey and how it infuses his perspective on public issues today.

Nevertheless, there is a major question of whether Obama's experience and popularity among all aspects of the Democratic constituency will allow him to be successful. Many see him as a potential substitute for Hillary Clinton's bid for the presidency and thus, might support him in order to block her path. And while rumors abound that Bill Clinton has said his wife will not seek the presidency and that Obama might suffice, and Hillary coyly welcomes him into the fray, I see a pair of experienced polls at work.

Bill and Hillary know that very often candidates who look hot in the heat of the day can cool very quickly when they are held up to the glare of the spotlight of excruciating public examination. And while Obama looks good now, they also know that he has no military experience, he has no administrative experience, he would have scant legislative experience in the Senate and thus, little time to have built a record of accomplishments. So, for now the most that he offers is charisma and a personal story that many feel reflects the leadership needed in the future of a more diverse American society.

In this examination, the attitude of blacks will be important and I have yet to hear Barack Obama make a series of tough speeches on the nature of American racism, or offer creative solutions that begin to resolves the critical economic, social and political issues that still plague black America. The black vote constitutes one-quarter of the Democratic base, but it will be interesting to see whether it drives a hard bargain demanding that Obama represent them, or settles, as it has often done, for a "first-black" promise of symbolic value. I would be surprised if the former holds, so I expect the latter.

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Organization buying in and selling out

NAACP President Bruce Gordon, in an interview in Black Enterprise magazine (September 2005), speaking about New Orleans, said, "Most recently there's been a lot of concern about the way African Americans are treated in the French Quarter... folks there don't treat them very nicely. I would say in addition to [marching], we should take our dollars elsewhere... That, to me, is a more significant message than a protest because it has an economic impact on the offenders."



JAMES
CLINGMAN

When I read that, I thought, "What a great statement from the national leader of the largest and oldest black civil rights organization in this country. Wow! I have to meet this brother and explore ways to support his directives. One of the first things I did was get involved with the NAACP chapter in Cincinnati."

We had a relatively new, feisty, unafraid, non-capitulating sister as local president, who was stirring up things and standing up for black people in this town, especially in the economic development arena. I was hyped; I was charged; I was fired-up; I was ready to do whatever I could to help. After all, I knew the NAACP national president had her back.

She had the leverage to effect real change in the business-as-usual attitude of this city, which always results in black folks getting very little when it comes to the billions of dollars spent on economic development, despite a glut of blacks in authoritative positions. She stood up, she spoke out, and she was determined, as she put it, never to back down or let up the pressure until her demands for equity were met.

Our local NAACP president wrote a memo excoriating the outright disrespectful way she has been treated, and how black people are ignored by those in charge of the billion dollar riverfront development project called The Banks. (Incidentally, blacks comprise nearly 50 percent of this city's population.) Historically, blacks have been excluded from significant opportunities to reap the benefits of public and private projects, via development rights, but finally we had someone in an influential position that was not going to take it any longer.

Well, that honeymoon didn't last very long. Three weeks after writing that memo to our group, decrying the mistreatment of black people by white folks, voicing her unhappiness at being disrespected, and saying she would be "ashamed to invite [The national NAACP convention] to Cincinnati, something changed. She wrote, 'Authoritatively, I can say the NAACP would be unwilling to come to a town and hold a multi-million dollar convention where our leadership does not respect African Americans.'"

Just three weeks later, she actually shed tears of joy when the National NAACP Board agreed to hold its convention in Cincinnati. In that brief interim her righteous indignation changed to wild-eyed exuberance at the fact that millions of black dollars would now be brought to the city where, in her words, "leadership does not respect African Americans or women."

My "educated" guess is that another black organization in Cincinnati has been reeled in by the temptations of filthy lucre, the illusion of inclusion, and the shallow disingenuous rhetoric of fakery and hypocrites.

In this latest situation, black folks started out with proud protestations and podium-pounding press conferences, demanding equity on The Banks Project, only to end up with passive posturing and pretentious pontification. They became puppets that parroted the corporate Cincinnati line: "Come to our city, black people, and bring us your dollars to help finance the oppression and mistreatment of your people."

I knew something was up when I saw the NAACP standing with the police chief, the man who has used the n-word and presided over some of the worst treatment of blacks by police in the history of this town. The civil rights of many black people have been violated in this city, just over the past six years; yet we have THE black civil rights organization being persuaded to come to Cincinnati by this same police chief. That's right. He was a member of the "welcoming" team. I would warn the NAACP members who bring their children here; keep them close to you. U.S. Rep. and Cincinnati, Steve Chabot, pointed out in one of his campaign ads that it's legal to use 50,000-volt tasers on 7-year-old children in this city.

Brother Bruce Gordon, in his statement to Black Enterprise, told us that economic problems call for economic solutions. I could be wrong, but in this case it seems he may be doing the moonwalk on his own words. Our local NAACP president appears to have done the same thing, as she decried the mistreatment and disrespect of Black people, but acquiesced to appeasement and pacification by the vaunted Cincinnati moneychangers.

Frustrated? Yeah, I guess I am. But I am not surprised. Disappointed? You bet, but it's not the first time, and I am not the first brother or sister to be let down by our people. I was just so ready, so prepared to do battle for us, one more time. Yet again we have proven to be our own worst enemy.

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Love Africa? Then let's do this for her

A few years ago former Congressman J.C. Watts sent out a flyer that he was embarking on a trade mission to Africa and solicited participants. It sounded interesting to me, so I registered for the trip. Shortly thereafter, his chief of staff called me and asked if I could go as an individual, not as a principal of the National Black Chamber of Commerce. In addition to charging a fee that was twice the actual cost (so that participants could pay their own way plus that of the government employees), they wanted



HARRY
ALFORD

us to go as neutrals – without portfolio or mission. I told him I was insulted and now realize it was all about his boss "profiling" instead of doing something for Africa. "Good-bye and never mind."

Such is the plight of Africa. So many African-Americans profiling and claiming to care but when you get right down to it they are looking for a new place to party. Too few appear to be serious.

This is what is immediately needed in Africa:

1. Darfur, Sudan is the latest in a long line of genocides. If Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were in Congress now, he would jam it up with filibuster and obstruction until this nation would act affirmatively. Just like Rwanda, we have a leadership that just goes to sleep on this. We must wake up or shock Congress and this administration into quick and strong action. No one group should be allowed to perform genocide on another right before our eyes. With 42 black elected officials one would think there would be some courageous fighters against this evil. Getting arrested in front of the Sudan embassy and posting immediate bail doesn't get it any longer. We need substance.

2. A major killer of children in Africa is malaria. The solution is simple. Just as Europe and the United States did back in the 1920s, we spray the infested areas with DDT. Shortly, the death rate of millions of Africans would subside and the quality of health care would greatly improve. Oh yeah, we can work on saving a few species of animals as the need arises but the mission is to save human beings.

3. Do not move a single penny into an African nation without proof of full compliance with HIV/AIDS prevention and care. We have a minister of health in South Africa telling her people to eat more vegetables and HIV/AIDS will go away. All the while, 300,000 South Africans are dying each year. Let's get real.

4. All USAID, TDA and other such funding for Africa must go exclusively on its infrastructure. Viable roads, water and sewer lines, wastewater treatment, bridges, power plants, schools and hospitals should be the top priority. These funds should go out as competitive bids and contracts to USAfrican joint ventures. No more consulting contracts, feasibility studies, conflict resolution exercises and other inconsequential over priced exercises. We need infrastructure for economic vitality and an atmosphere consistent with progress. Let's stop flushing billions of valuable dollars down the toilet for worthless programs on an annual basis.

5. Let's stop "Third Country Loopholes" to Africa. Any trade enhancements or initiatives should be between the United States and sub-Saharan African nations exclusively. What does China, Malaysia, Mauritius, etc. have to do between us and Africa? Thanks for the interest Europe, Asia, etc. but we are going to do this deal and make it work for the intended party – sub-Saharan Africa. It is so sad to see a Black congressman speaking on behalf of Asian or other interests saying that Africa isn't ready for the big time so let's let China or whoever in the deal in exchange for menial jobs. Currently, a member of the Congressional Black Caucus is touting China for raw cotton and textile production in Africa under the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). He says in exchange Africans can receive \$80 per month sweating over some sewing machines. One African ambassador told me it's "intellectually insulting" but I declare it downright crazy.

What was the Voting Rights Act for if it wasn't to empower African-Americans and provide a natural ally and resource for Africa? It is shameful, despicable and extremely dangerous what we have going on right now. Wake up black America! It's time to hold our so called leaders and elected officials accountable. Millions of children depend on us.

Starting in January we are going to track each member of the CBC and other key congressional members to see what they are doing for Africa on a quarterly basis. We will let you know.

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It's time to show solidarity with Hurricane Katrina survivors

By Rev. Barbara Reynolds

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Of course I didn't welcome an outbreak of shingles that brought a painful set of bright red rashes and blisters upon my body during my assignment to listen to testimony of Katrina survivors as one of 20 commissioners of the Katrina National Justice Commission this summer.

I couldn't understand initially why I was the only one of the 20 to develop this painful virus. Later, doctors explained that either I couldn't tolerate the stress of listening and identifying with so much sorrow or the mix of

death, disease coupled with high amounts of mercury, arsenic, lead, mold, mildew in the environment was too toxic for someone like me whose immune system is already stressed to the max.

In retrospect, however, I appreciate the ordeal. The scars are so seared into my body that Hurricane Katrina remains personal. If my body broke down after only two days from the mental or physical stress of the Katrina aftermath, think about the stress and strain of the Katrina survivors who are trying to get on with their lives after seeing dead bodies in the street, some of whom were their own relatives or

friends.

I will never forget Katrina, how when the poorest, the sickest and the most vulnerable of our citizens needed our government as a matter of life or death, the Bush administration didn't care.

Now it is our turn to speak out, to stand up and show our solidarity to the victims and survivors of Katrina, the greatest man-made tragedy of the 21st century.

We can let our views, our outrage be known by simply taking a walk to the polls and voting the uncaring, hard-hearted, elitist Republicans out of office, wherever they are found. They do not deserve our vote.

They should be sent into exile.

Under the direction of Iva E. Carruthers, a protégée of Pastor Jeremiah Wright of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, the commission took on the sacred task of remembering, bearing witness and standing in the gap for thousands who were harmed in some way by the disaster. The commission heard testimony from Sen. Hillary Clinton, who urged holding public officials accountable for their inaction. Officials from the Federal Emergency Management Administration, the Red Cross, the NAACP, Houston

Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, were among those who testified along with survivors and victims of the disaster.

With little outside help, this group was able to save elderly and disabled women and men caught in their attics by the water and to provide food and water to desperate people.

Studies show that the suicide rate for survivors of the Katrina disaster are rising at alarming rates.

Among the commission's recommendations are the establishing of an independent bipartisan fully-empowered congressional commission and that Congress establishes an assistance fund to

deal with questions of housing reimbursement, insurance, mental health, job training and business opportunities.

"Like 9/11, the goal of making whole the people of New Orleans, who experienced the nation's worst disaster, should be a priority for all Americans," says Carruthers.

Carruthers' vision for New Orleans will never be implemented under the present callous, Republican-controlled administration and Congress. A change is long overdue.

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